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SUBJECT: BARBADOS ANNOUNCES NEW IMMIGRATION POLICY

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) A recent announcement by Barbados PM David Thompson that places greater restrictions on undocumented CARICOM aliens has elicited negative reactions from the opposition, the local Guyanese community, and regional commentators. While the policy is consistent with other GOB actions to "fence in" economic opportunities for Barbadian nationals, it flies in the face of their purported support for greater regional integration and effectively negates their traditional criticism of U.S. criminal alien deportee policies. End Summary.

THE NEW POLICY

¶2. (U) On May 5, Barbados Prime Minister Thompson announced that effective June 1, all undocumented CARICOM nationals who arrived in Barbados prior to December 31, 2005 and have remained on the island undocumented for eight years or more are required to report to the Immigration Department to have their status regularized. Failure to do so, he noted, would result in deportation from December 1. (Note: It is unclear why they have selected the December 2005 date given that no one could have lived eight years in Barbados unless they arrived in 2001. End Note).

¶3. (U) Under the government's new policy, conditions for regularization include (1) an application for immigrant status; (2) the ability to substantiate the claim that the applicant has been residing in Barbados for at least eight years prior to December 31, 2005 specifically before January 1, 1998; (3) the ability to provide evidence of current employment; (4) Spouses and children residing in Barbados with the applicant are also eligible to apply under the new policy; (5) all applicants will undergo a security background check; (6) applicants with three dependents or more will be considered but will not automatically qualify for status.

¶4. (U) Under the new policy, CARICOM non-nationals who have been in Barbados undocumented for less than eight years will be deported. The government has yet to detail how this new deportation policy will be implemented. In line with the government's existing policy (which parallels that of the United States), those with criminal records will be deported at the end of their incarceration or sooner if it is found that they have remained undocumented in Barbados.

¶5. (U) The new immigration policy is based on recommendations made by a Cabinet subcommittee on immigration set up in June, 2008 to investigate the levels of illegal immigration. The subcommittee contended that the current levels of illegal immigrants on the island are "unacceptably high, increasingly difficult to control and posed potentially negative socio-economic challenges for the country."

NEGATIVE REACTIONS

¶6. (SBU) The Opposition reacted immediately, speaking out against

the new immigration policy. Leader of the Opposition Mia Mottley charged that the new policy will lead to discrimination against every regional traveler to the island and give the impression that the Government of Barbados is only concerned with Caribbean illegal immigrants in the country (as opposed to illegal immigration writ large). This, she argued, could cause a backlash for Barbados in the region as 53 percent of Barbadian exports go to regional countries and 20 percent of tourist arrivals are from across the region. Mottley also expressed concern for those non-nationals who may have unsuccessfully tried to regularize their status due to the inefficiencies of the Immigration Department. She stressed that this issue should be dealt in a delicate and transparent manner so that it does not breach the Barbados Constitution, the Treaty of Chaguaramas (CARICOM Treaty), and the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society.

17. (SBU) The Honorary Consul for Guyana in Barbados, meanwhile, has appealed to undocumented Guyanese living in Barbados to deal with only the Immigration Department or the consulate on matters relating to their status in the country. He said he fears that unscrupulous people such as lawyers and consultants will take advantage of the situation and charge exorbitant prices for unnecessary "advice" and "representation."

COMMENT

18. (SBU) This new policy is consistent with other actions by the government intended to improve economic opportunities for Barbadians. In recent months the government has tried to implement "buy Barbadian" campaigns, and some international businesses have

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complained that work permits for expatriate staff have been delayed inexplicably for months -- which they see as a pressure tactic to encourage more local hiring for high-paying management jobs. The policy is also consistent with an ingrained undercurrent of anti-Guyanese sentiment in Barbados -- Barbadians complain that illegal Guyanese workers take jobs away from Barbadians, depress local wages, and sap public services. The new policy also flies in the face of CARICOM's stated intention to integrate the region more closely through the CSME (Caribbean Single Market and Economy) process, which ultimately envisions free movement of people inside the CARICOM space.

19. (SBU) Of greater interest from the U.S. perspective, is that the Barbadian position would seem to undermine the country's oft-stated position that the U.S. should not deport illegal aliens back to their country of origin, but rather should integrate them into U.S. society. Barbados, like all CARICOM countries, has strongly opposed the U.S. policy of deporting criminal aliens to their country of citizenship upon completion of their sentences. Caribbean leaders have claimed, despite evidence to the contrary, that returning deportees are a leading cause of rising crime rates in their countries. A 2007 joint UN/World Bank study found no such link, and in fact found recidivism rates among deportees to be lower than among the general criminal population. Barbados' new immigration policy takes exactly the same action against illegal CARICOM national aliens that the U.S. takes against all criminal aliens -- cutting the legs out from under their complaints about our policies and implicitly recognizing the need for countries to accept all their citizens, even the criminals, back into their country of citizenship.

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